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## THE FUTURE OF PAINTING

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# THE FUTURE OF PAINTING

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BY  
WILLARD HUNTINGTON WRIGHT

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## THE FUTURE OF PAINTING



# THE FUTURE OF PAINTING

## I

That a grave misconception attaches to the art of modernist painting should be evident from the bitter warfare which, for over a century, has raged between the advocates of the older painting and the exponents of the new. Never before in the history of art has there existed so violent and prolonged a controversy concerning the merits and demerits of opposing æsthetic procedures. Practically the entire artistic world has divided into two hostile camps, with diametrically opposed doctrines and beliefs. Critics have aligned themselves on one side or the other, and have given an exhibition of polemical vindictiveness unsurpassed in the records of judicial literature. Even the layman, usually a silent and indifferent spectator to the clashes of æsthetic partisanship, has taken a hand, and expressed his opinion in

no uncertain terms. Scientists, doctors, and psychologists have come forth as "expert" witnesses, and added to the general confusion.

There have always been differences of ideals between old and new manifestations of thought; and conflicts of opinion accompany all intellectual progress and creative effort. But during the great periods of the world's æsthetic activity one can find always in the opposing factions a certain uniformity of purpose and homogeneity of inspiration. The two schools of painting during the nineteenth century, however, have revealed no such unified evolutionary direction. In purposes, ideals and methods, graphic art has followed two distinct lines of development—each group of adherents earnestly, and often viciously, attacking the other, and refusing to grant even a basis of truth or reason to its opponents.

Moreover, as time went by, there were no evidences of a *rapprochement* or mutual understanding. To-day—one hundred and twenty-five years after the early pioneers of "modern painting" hoisted the banner of a new art-procedure—the antagonism is more bitter than at any stage of its existence. Nor is this schism in the ranks of painting a condition of the past two decades.

The same violent factional opposition has existed since the precursors of modernist movement—Turner, Bonington, Constable, Delacroix, Courbet and Daumier—first reacted against the formulas and traditions of the neo-classicists, and set in motion that sweeping current of a new art which has drawn into its tempestuous tide many of the greatest talents of modern times.

In order to understand the perpetually widening chasm between academic painting and “modernist painting,” and to arrive at an explanation for the seemingly irreconcilable attitudes held by the exponents of these two procedures, it is necessary to define the art of painting as originally conceived, and to trace its evolution to the point where disintegration set in. Moreover, it is necessary to analyze the basic purposes of painting as an art, and to determine just what impulses and aims motivated its prosecution.

## II

Oil-painting was an outgrowth of other forms of art, but principally of sculpture. Indeed, the finest examples of painting during the Renaissance—the epoch in which the primary pictorial impulse reached its fruition—were wholly sculptural. The art of painting as practiced by Giotto, Giorgione, Veronese, Titian and Leonardo, may be said to have absorbed the art of sculpture. Sculpture reached a high point of development with the Greeks. But it was Michelangelo who, because of his colossal powers of organization, succeeded in adding the third plane to sculpture, thus taking the final step in the art of plastic form. Sculpture, as a creative art, died with Michelangelo. He exhausted its possibilities as an æsthetic medium. After his achievements in marble there were no longer any unsolved problems confronting the sculptor; and all sculpture since his day has been but a modification or restatement of what he accomplished.



The art of painting, like sculpture, was based on definite principles—technical, intellectual and philosophic. These principles were as old as art itself. They were, in fact, the basic principles of all æsthetic creation. The painter had only to master these principles and to restate them in a new medium. When the Van Eycks—the practical inventors of oil-painting—made possible a new art-form, art-theory was already far advanced; and so the established principles of art were merely transferred to another *métier*. During the Renaissance these principles reached a very profound degree of sophisticated projection, despite the fact that oil-painting was only a century or so old. But none of the Italians succeeded in completely and finally projecting these principles in oil. There was still one more step to be taken, just as there had been one more step to be taken in sculpture after the Greeks.

In much the same way that Michelangelo carried sculpture to its final decimal point, so did Rubens carry the art of painting to its ultimate statement. In Rubens the art of oil-painting, as a living creative factor, culminated. The principles of form were mastered and given expression by him for all time. The problems of organization, in relation to the graphic medium,

were solved and set aside. Since Rubens, the only advances in painting have been in the realm of methods and means. The only problems which faced the painter who came after him were purely technical ones. And even these problems have now been solved. No painter has surpassed, or ever will surpass, Rubens, no matter how much the surface aspect of canvases may change.

A perfect parallel exists in music. The art of music culminated in Beethoven—that is to say: Beethoven gave a final statement to the principles of musical form. His symphonies, as form, will never be surpassed. All significant compositions since his time have been based upon his æsthetic structures.

However, there have been many researches made on the technical side of music. Numerous advances in methods have taken place, such as the development of the orchestra, and the complicating of harmonics. It is only along the line of what we might call the orchestration of painting that there has been any progress in the graphic art since Rubens.

The “new” music is, in reality, an art of sound and harmonics; for it is primarily scientific, and has to do almost exclusively with the *medium* of

music. Whether one employs a whole-tone scale, a new set of chord-sequences and a highly augmented and complicated orchestra with all manner of novel effects, or whether one uses merely the primitive harmonics and simple orchestral musical form of Haydn, the fundamental statement of the principles of musical form are in no way altered. The æsthetic basis of music itself is not affected. A Beethoven symphony played on a piano in simplified arrangement, is just as advanced, just as profound and final, from the standpoint of musical form, as if played by a one-hundred-and-fifty-piece orchestra, and arranged by the most modern of contrapuntalists and mathematical harmonists.

Painting, however, developed technically far beyond music. The medium of painting kept almost abreast of the development of its æsthetic content. To-day there are no longer any problems, either technical or æsthetic, confronting the painter. Painting is, and has been for many years, a finished art. For, in any definition of an art, the original intent must be considered.

What, then, one asks, has been the nature of all the labor and researches in painting since Rubens? If painting terminated with Rubens, what is the status of the great pictorial artists

since his day? Are we to repudiate all the splendid work done by the more modern men? Are the new color-theories of Delacroix to go for naught? Are the volumnear conceptions of Daudmier to be ignored? Are we to disregard the experimentations in light made by the Impressionists? The chromatic, optical, and formal researches of Cézanne, the harmonies of Matisse, the planar abstractions of the Cubists, the rationalization of the palette by the Synchronists—are all these technical advances of no value to the world of art?

The answer to these questions is the crux of the whole disagreement between the academic painters and the modernists. The truth is that so-called modern painting is not an art of painting at all. The experiments and researches in pictorialism since 1800 have been along the lines of an entirely new art—an art basically distinct from that of painting—an art whose purposes, impulses, motives and final goal are intrinsically different from those of the art of painting.

### III

"Modernist painting," against which the advocates of academic painting have protested so bitterly, is, in reality, an *art of color*. And the reason that it is so widely misunderstood and has given rise to so many misconceptions, is due to the fact that, for over a hundred years, it has been measured by the standards of painting to which it does not, and can not, conform, any more than the art of the drama can be made to conform to the standards of the art of poetry.

The new art of color has been condemned by the exponents of painting because it did not fulfill the functions of painting; and the art of painting has been condemned by exponents of the new art of color because it did not fulfill the functions of the new art of color. The misunderstanding has been mutual. The entire conflict has been one of a misconception of purpose and ideals—one might almost say, of nomenclature.

This confusing of two separate arts, and the

continual efforts to reconcile two divergent methods of æsthetic procedure, and to measure each by the other's standard, grew originally out of the fact that their *métiers* and processes were identical. Also, there were certain apparent, but not actual, similarities of purpose in the two arts, which resulted in the new art of color being regarded as a development of painting—a logical and direct development, according to the defenders of modern art; a distorted and abortive development, according to the adherents of the older painting. But while the art of color sprang from, and grew out of, the art of painting, it was, in reality, an independent organism. Its evolution, instead of being a direct *progressus*, was in the nature of a differentiation.

In very much the same way have the different forms of literary art sprung from the saga and the fable. Poetry, the drama, criticism, and the novel are individual arts, each governed by, and accountable to, its own specific laws and standards. Though possessing a common source, and making use of the same *métier*, they are positive differentiations of a specific mother impulse. In like manner the art of color has differentiated itself from the art of painting; and though it has expressed itself thus far through the same *métier*

(namely: canvas, paint, and pictorial objectivity), it has followed its own purposes and impulses, irrespective of the purposes and impulses of the older art of painting.

Aside from the borrowed *métier* of this new art of color, which has led even its practitioners to misinterpret its true status, there was a long period of gestation during which the outward manifestations of the two arts were so similar—due to the minuteness of the differentiation process—that their separate individualities were barely distinguishable; and the one was therefore regarded as a slight variation of the other. The confusion arising from this similarity spread and took root. Soon it became a fixed notion in the world of art. In time every new manifestation of the art of color was accepted as an attempt to alter the status of the art of painting, to improve upon the conceptions of the Renaissance and Rubens, and to push forward the evolution of the graphic art. As the breach between the two “schools” widened—that is, as the art of color drew further and further away from that of painting—the misunderstanding increased, and the exponents of the two arts became more and more alienated.

Had the progenitors themselves of this new art not mistaken the impulses which animated their

various researches, and had they at once hoisted the flag of a new æsthetic procedure and sought at once for a new medium, the world would then have been spared all this controversy between the classicists and the modernists. But such a course was, in the very nature of things, impossible. So closely were the early impulses of pictorial experimentation related to the impulses of the art of painting, that canvas and pigments were the natural and instinctive means for the work of research to which these pioneers set themselves.

Although the early modernists felt the urge of new discoveries and the necessity for the solving of new problems, their creative instincts were so intimately allied to the external aspects of painting, that they themselves did not at first draw the line of distinction between the two arts. To the contrary, they immediately set up an elaborate *a-posteriori* defense of their activities from the standpoint of painters. Only Cézanne, the greatest and perhaps most self-conscious of all the new men, recognized the truth. Shortly before his death he said: "I have not 'realized,' and I shall never 'realize' now. *I shall always remain the primitive of the way I have opened.*"

There is no doubt that habit also had much to do with the choice of canvas and paint by the



precursors of the new color-art. The technique of painting was familiar; and there were no obstacles to overcome in the handling of the painter's tools. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that the art of painting was the matrix out of which the art of color grew, and that there was a period of almost identical interests—a period of parturition, as it were, during which the art of painting carried in its womb the germs of this new life. Therefore, it was necessary for the latter to express itself through the art of painting, at least until the embryonic growth should have been completed. Later, when the birth of the new art took place, there was a separation; and the two art-forms proceeded to function as distinct entities. But so widely disseminated and deeply implanted had become the idea that the two arts were identical, that even when the separation came, the true situation was not recognized. Instead, an increased antagonism rose between the two groups of artists, their camp-followers and partisans, each group imagining itself the rightful interpreters of the other's doctrines.

## IV

Another potent reason for this confusion and misunderstanding lies in the widely manifested influence exerted on the art of painting by the new art of color, as well as the obvious evidences that the new art of color derived almost unlimited inspiration from the older art of painting. The visual bond alone has been sufficient to mislead many into accepting both arts as merely divergent manifestations of the same impulse. The art of color has certainly had a profound effect upon painting—even upon the most traditional and formalized academic painting. Of late years there has been evident in the most conservative of “*salon*” pictures a new freedom of technique, a broader approach to subject-matter, a deeper concern with organization and abstract form, and, above all, a much bolder, purer and more vital use of color. The old-fashioned pictorial anecdote has almost disappeared; and the meticulous, photographic technique, so popular a half-century

ago, has given place to broad, vigorous and impressionistic brushing.

These influences, however, do not prove or even indicate a consanguinity between the two arts. Mutual influences in the arts are always to be found; and similarities in technical procedure are very often due to a common source of domination from without, rather than to an interactivity between the art-forms themselves—just as the resemblance of two persons may be traced to a common parent rather than to any mutual imitative mechanism. The new freedom, in both conception and execution, which marks the work of modern scholastic painters, is attributable as much to those general demands for intensity in æsthetic stimuli (which brought forth the art of color) as to the direct influence of the new art itself. Indeed, it is wholly a specious contention that the change in academic art proves the soundness of the modernist æsthetic.

That academic art has been influenced, however, is undeniable. But academic art has given far more to the new art of color than the new art of color has given to academic art. We can find abundant influences of the art of poetry in the art of the drama; and the modern naturalistic novel has most certainly exerted an influence on the art

of poetry. (One notices it in Masfield, for instance.) But such influences do not indicate even a similarity of æsthetic objective. Nor is either art thus influenced by a sister art to be condemned because the ultimate effects of the imitation are not the same as in the other.

Therefore, the mutual influence of academic art and modernistic art can not be advanced as evidence that they are striving towards the same goal, and that one achieves its æsthetic purpose with greater efficiency than the other. Their goals are entirely different, and their influence upon one another must not be mistaken for an attempt to usurp one another's field. Nor should either art be disparaged or denounced because it fails to attain the goal towards which the other is striving.

I have sought to define briefly the art of painting and to indicate its motives and its aims. In order, therefore, to clarify the duality of the dispute centering about modernistic art, it is also necessary to analyze the motives and aims of the new art of color, and to point out those conditions in modern life which have brought it into existence; for all art springs into being in response to an emotional and psychological demand. Then, with a definition of the art of color, and a defini-

tion of the art of painting, an æsthetic comparison may be made, which will at once reveal the fundamental divergencies of these two creative impulses.

Once these divergencies become manifest—once the world is brought to realize that the modern colorist is not attempting to usurp the prerogatives of painting, and that the continuance of academic painting can in no way affect the prosecution and development of the art of color—then the causes of animosity and dissension will have been removed, and competition, enmity and misunderstanding will disappear. For, in reality, there is no excuse or reason for the differences of opinion between the academic painter and the modernist.

## V

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the creative artist—and especially the artist whose æsthetic instincts tended towards visual expression—felt the need of a new method of stating his artistic concepts. He had come to realize that the existing graphic means were exhausted. The colossal forms of Rubens, organized with a highly sensitized and magistral technique, left the painter facing a *néant*. To surpass Rubens was impossible. The principles of composition had been mastered and stated in perfectly poised three-dimensional form. The implication of abstract plasticity had been projected through recognizable subject-matter; and nothing was to be gained by merely eliminating the naturalistic object—the only possible logical step left for the painter to take. In fact, the elimination of representative document would do away with, or at least greatly diminish, the emotional appeal of painting; for the form, being intellectual, re-

quired the emotional balance of objective nature. Hence, to carry painting to its logical conclusion would result in a *reductio ad absurdum*.

Wherein, then, lay the opportunity for visual expression, without resorting to mere repetition and imitation? The answer was: in color. (In Ruskin's expositions of Turner's painting, and in the notebooks of Delacroix, we find abundant evidence that these two great precursors of the art of color reasoned along this very line; and that their reasoning—often instinctive and intuitive—led to their elaborate color-theories and to their entirely new treatment of pigments.)

Paradoxical as it may seem, all painting up to the time of Turner and Delacroix was an art of black-and-white. Color played no organic part in the classic pictorial conception. All forms and rhythms were conceived and expressed in *drawing*; and all volumes and tones—namely: the means for obtaining solidity and structure—were produced by the scale of grays. The "studies" for most of the great masterpieces of the past were done in monotint; and the most profound problems presented by these pictures were solved by line and black-and-white masses. We know that in some of the greatest of the old canvases the color-scheme and even the tonal tints

were not decided upon until the picture had been fully conceived and worked out. Color, as a rule, was put on as an afterthought, generally in imitation of nature, as a kind of decoration or beautification. It was, in short, merely a reinforcement of drawing. This is why the majority of the works of the old masters are as artistic in black-and-white reproduction as in their original colors. In fact, many an old masterpiece is superior in black-and-white reproduction, for it comes nearer to the artist's original conception; and the functioning of the superimposed colors (which was not then understood) does not clash with the functioning of the lines and forms.

The fact is—and it is too often overlooked—that *the art of painting is not an art of color*. Color, indeed, had practically nothing to do with the æsthetic evolution of painting. Had there been only black-and-white oil-paints, the art of painting would still have progressed in very much the same way that it has done, and the achievements of the art of painting would have been practically what they are now, save that they would have been less decorative, less naturalistic, and less emotional.

The so-called modern painter, realizing this



fact, focused his attention on color, and endeavored to make it an intrinsic and organic element in the projection of pictorial forms. In so doing, he reversed the very process of the art of painting. For a time he even ignored the principles of form and the laws of composition on which the art of painting was based. His achievements had nothing in common with painting beyond the superficial projection of visual nature. His entire concern was with the theory of color. All the activities in "modern painting" have had one object for their goal—the solution of the problems of color. To call these researches and experimentations the art of painting is a contradiction, and a denial of the very foundation on which that art was reared.

Turner sought to heighten the intensity of color. Delacroix strove to develop the dramatic possibilities of color. The Impressionists endeavored to solve the problem of light and vibration. The Pointillists carried the science of color-juxtaposition and the interactivity of complementaries to a coldly intellectual extreme. Gauguin worked exclusively in the decorative values of pure color. Matisse devoted himself to the harmonic relationships of color. The Cubists

sought to eliminate objectivity—the essence of painting—and to achieve form by intersecting tonal planes. Cézanne carried his researches in the optics of chromatic gradations to a point where he was able to determine the active functions of color, and thus to supplant form with color, thereby achieving a simultaneous conception, and eliminating the very basis of painting—namely: representation by line and mass in the scale of black-and-white. The Synchronists, carrying forward Cézanne's discoveries, coördinated and rationalized the palette, and made of every color and tone in the painter's entire gamut a relatively fixed attribute in the construction of form.

This, in brief, is an outline of the evolution of what is erroneously termed "modern painting." At no point in this evolution is there discernible a single fundamental relationship with the art of older painting; and for several decades even the demands of æsthetic form were ignored. Every advance, every new step, was along the line of scientific or harmonic color-research. What is more, no experimentation or discovery made by the exponents of this new art affected the status of painting, or altered a single truth or principle of that art. There has been no actual conflict,

for both the methods and the aims of the new art of color are wholly outside the realm of painting as originally conceived and practiced for four hundred years.

## VI

Where the art of color reveals its greatest dissimilarity to the art of painting is in the incentive which produced it. As I have stated in my "Modern Painting" and elsewhere, this new art of color is striving for an intensity of effect which the older painting does not possess. The world to-day demands more powerful æsthetic stimuli than it did in the past. The reason for this is to be found in the new conditions of modern life, and in the corresponding emotional development of mankind. Modern life has markedly increased in intensity as a result of mechanics, densely populated areas, the flooding of the mind with a vast amount of knowledge of events through the perfecting of means for collecting news, the rapidity of travel, the world's swiftly moving panorama, the discoveries in brilliant artificial lights, etc. These complexities and intensifications in man's existence to-day tend to deaden the mind, through the senses, to the

subtleties of minute variations of grays, the monotonies of simple melodies and rhythms, and similar manifestations of a day when febrile living had not blunted the sensibilities.

All art must dominate life. This is as true to-day as in the Middle Ages. The modern workers in color have realized that only by perfecting the purely mechanical side of painting can a new intensity, commensurate with modern needs, be achieved in the realm of visual art. To be sure, great painting will always remain great as long as our organisms remain unchanged; yet the demands of human evolution must be met; and it is a result of these demands that the means and media of all the arts are to-day being developed through study and experimentation. This is what is known as the "modern movement."

We hear many complaints directed at the public's indifference toward painting; and the truth is that to-day only painters are vitally interested in painting *as an art*. The reason is that the average painter of to-day has little realization that the world—psychologically speaking—has progressed since 1600. He is apparently unaware that the emotional development of three centuries has rendered the art of painting inadequate

to the æsthetic needs of the present. The modern art of color has, by its very vividness, attracted a host of admirers who might otherwise seek a mild reaction in conventional painting. The painter naturally sees in this new art a dangerous rival. His animosity is therefore aroused automatically, like a sort of protective mechanism. The fault, of course lies in the fact that he is still living in an olden, placid age before complexity and noise blunted man's sensibilities and created a demand for a more powerful stimulant. Only the "modern painter"—to wit: the researcher in color—has sensed the change.

Music, on the other hand, has developed and enlarged its scope to meet the public's æsthetic needs. The orchestra has been greatly augmented; new instruments have been invented; more brass is used; and the volume of "noise" in orchestration has been increased. Furthermore, the forms of music have grown more intricate and profound. The fugue and the rondo evolved into the Bach quartette; and the quartette, in Haydn's hands, was developed into the symphony. Even the symphony was extended and complicated by Beethoven and Brahms. Then new harmonics, new effects and new scales came into vogue. In fine, the stimulus of music

grew more powerful as mankind demanded more powerful reactions.

The development of literature progressed similarly. Not only did new and intricate forms of literary art arise, but the older forms—poetry, fiction, and the drama—increased in intensity. In both music and literature one sees a constant evolutionary process at work; and that process has gone hand in hand with mankind's æsthetic evolution. Regard the novel of fifty years ago, or the orchestra in Beethoven's time; and then compare these two art-types with the corresponding types of to-day. Beethoven's orchestra would not meet the emotional demands of the present. Nor would the old-fashioned 200,000-word novel, with its quiet, leisurely manner and its prolix verbiage, satisfy our modern literary tastes. How, then, can we expect the painting of two or three centuries ago to supply our current emotional needs?

The reason that music and literature have been able to keep more or less abreast of the æsthetic requirements of man, is that these two arts were practically in their infancy when painting was approaching its final and complete flowering. Painting during the Renaissance had progressed, in the statement of form and in the evolution of

organizational principles, further than music had progressed in the hands of Beethoven and Brahms. That complicated and perfectly balanced example of æsthetic form, which we call the symphony, had achieved a corresponding development in painting at the time of Giorgione, Titian and Veronese. And the orchestrating of forms—namely, the technical means for projecting compositional concepts—such as music attained to during the latter part of the nineteenth century, had reached a correspondingly advanced stage in painting, at the time of Rubens. In brief, the mastering of the basic problems of art, and the organized statement of the principles of æsthetic form, which are to-day occupying the attention of the exponents of music and literature, were completed by the exponents of painting centuries ago.

This is why there has been no modern progress in the art of painting, and why the æsthetic stimulus it offers is not sufficiently powerful to produce adequate reactions in the modern organisms. Furthermore, this emotional impotency of painting explains the greater public interest to-day in music and literature—a condition which was reversed in the Middle Ages.



## VII

Although the new art of color has tended to supplant the older art of painting, it can never replace painting. But because the art of color is still expressing itself through the borrowed medium of painting, it is generally considered a competitor of the graphic art; and this misinterpretation of its status has given rise to a further misconception which, in large measure, accounts for the animosity and ridicule so often aroused by examples of the modernist's work. Since the art of color is regarded as a competitor of painting, the mistaken conclusion to which the public has come is that the art of color, like painting, is a decorative art—or, rather, is striving to fulfill a decorative function.

Painting has always been accepted as a means for decorating the interior of buildings. During the Renaissance the primary object of painting was the beautification of the Church. Gradually pictures found their way into all manner of pub-

lic buildings, and finally into the home. So firmly has this decorative idea taken hold of both public and painter, that houses are now built with the hanging of pictures in mind; and the size and shape and subjects of canvases have been influenced by the demands of mural hanging.

But whereas the destiny of painting was a decorative one, the art of color fills no such utilitarian place in the æsthetic scheme of things. Not only is the very nature of this new art opposed to so neutral and passive a function, but the psychological needs which brought it forth preclude its being relegated to such a purpose. The art of color does not belong in the home. It is not an unobtrusive form of beauty which can be enjoyed or ignored at will; and it is essentially inappropriate as a constant accompaniment, or background, to our everyday existences. As I have pointed out, it is a highly intensified emotional stimulant—a stimulant, in fact, whose very intensity is its *raison d'être*. There is no escaping the effects of this art, once contact with it has been established. It is distracting and absorbing, and, when successfully conceived and executed, fixes the attention and produces a positive and poignant reaction—both intellectual and emotional.

When an admirer of academic painting remarks that he would go insane if he had to live day in and day out with one of these "modern" canvases, he is stating (in exaggerated terms) a simple and obvious truth. His implied criticism is wholly justified. But it is a criticism which in no way reflects upon the merits of the work of art in question, but which, to the contrary, indicates that the artist has achieved a more vivid and potent statement of pictorial form than is to be found in academic painting. Adjectives such as "harsh" and "blatant," when applied to examples of the new art, are, from the standpoint of painting, both accurate and just. The stricture implied in such adjectives rises from the mistaken notion that the art of color is seeking to fulfill the same destiny as is the art of painting, and is therefore to be gauged by the same standards. Obviously, harshness and blatancy are not virtues in painting. But, on the other hand, they do constitute a virtue when applied to the art of color.

The music, for instance, which we play in our homes must be subdued and accommodated to its surroundings. But when we attend a symphony concert, tremendous volumes of sound, large numbers of executants, and *fortissimo* passages are not out of place. That is to say, intensity in

æsthetic stimuli (namely: "harshness" or "blatancy") is, under certain conditions, not only a virtue but an essential. However, should a hostess in a private home entertain her guests for an entire evening with Brahms symphonies and Strauss tone-poems rendered by an orchestra of a hundred pieces, there would be quite as many derogatory ejaculations of "blatant" and "harsh" as we hear when it is proposed that one hangs examples of modern color-art in one's home.

The new art of color, despite its present *métier* and the fact that it is still in a groping, experimental stage, belongs not to the decorative and atmospheric arts, but to what may be called the entertainment art-form, such as the symphony concert, the drama, and the spectacle. When it has found its true medium, and has developed into a fixed and organized type of expression, it will lose its present utilitarian aspect, and will—beyond all peradventure of misconception—take its place alongside those æsthetic stimuli which possess our natures and our minds wholly during their exhibition, and which produce such reactions as can be endured only at intervals and for limited periods of time. Sculpture and the graphic arts do not belong in this category; and herein lies one of the most significant and fundamental dif-

ferences between the art of painting and the art of color. Indeed, when this new color-art has attained its inevitable goal, it will bear a much closer æsthetic relationship to music than to painting. Even now its achievements—slight and abecedary as they are—have, in many cases, proved themselves capable of producing keen emotional reactions.

## VIII

The reason why the reactions possible from this new art are far more intense and satisfying than the reactions to be obtained from painting, lies in the different physiological effects produced by the two media. The medium of painting is form represented by subject-matter—linear rhythms, chiaroscuro, and structural solidity achieved by black-and-white; whereas the medium of the art of color is a physical property which has a direct vibratory action upon the optic nerve of much the same kind that sound-waves have upon the ear-drum.

Without going into a scientific explanation of the difference between the medium of the art of painting and that of the art of color, I think I can make my point sufficiently clear by a simple analogy. For example, a single black line or smudge on a piece of white paper, when acting upon the eye, does not have the same physiological effect as does a single pure color. A color *in itself*

possesses what we call beauty—that is to say, it causes a pleasurable reaction, just as does a single note played on an organ. But a single gray, black or white line (or mass) does not produce this pleasing physical reaction. (Its equivalent in sound is a mere bit of natural noise; and, in an orchestra, black and gray are represented by the drums.)

The art of painting makes use of the latter medium; the art of color the former. The coloring or tinting of works of painting after their structural completion, may, as I have pointed out, enhance their visual appeal; but the colors thus applied are not the basis of the æsthetic form, and therefore are not the source of our enjoyment; for a painting in black-and-white reproduction is still a work of art, and provocative of an æsthetic reaction.

In the new art of color, however, color is the basis of the form, and hence the *source* of the æsthetic reaction. Therefore, the reaction possible in this latter art (other æsthetic values being equal) is infinitely more intense than in painting. In fact, the physical stimulation of color is often greater even than that of sound. During the past twenty-five years scientists have been experimenting in the effects of colors upon human and animal

organisms; and their findings—notably those of Dr. Jacques Loeb of Rockefeller Institute, in the field of heliotropism—prove conclusively that color holds infinite possibilities as a highly active mechanistic source of physiological reaction.

This new art, with color as its functioning medium and therefore as the basis of one's enjoyment of it, is, I predict, going to develop into what will be the most powerful and moving source of æsthetic pleasure the world has yet known. But its *métier* will not be canvas and pigment. The more rudimentary problems in this new art have already been solved; and even now it is divorcing itself from the very aspect of painting, and is seeking a means of expression which heretofore has never been associated with art-procedure. The result will be an entirely new art, as distinct from painting as is music or literature.



## IX

Thus far I have endeavored to show that so-called modern, or modernist, painting is not an art of painting at all, but an art of color, with impulses, functions and aims which are quite distinct from those of painting. I have also ventured the prediction that this new art of color, though temporarily expressing itself in the medium of painting, will in time develop into a source of one of the most intense and pleasurable æsthetic reactions which the world of art has yet known. At present the art of color is definitely limited in its means of projection; but there are sufficient indications by which the future status of this art may be determined.

The key to the art of the future lies in the question of medium. Herein we may find not only an explanation for the current misconceptions regarding it, but also the secret of its growth and evolution. So-called modern paintings—that is, pictorial representations of recognizable or semi-

recognizable subjects constructed according to the theories of the new researches in color—must be done on large canvases in order to be most effective. Unlike the art of painting, the art of color—even in its present hybrid state—demands expansive areas for adequate projection.

The modern home, however, is constantly growing smaller; wall-space to-day in the average house is at a premium. Obviously, therefore, the art of color can have but slight value as a vital expression of the modern creative instinct as long as it clings to the medium of canvas and paint. Its contact with the world would be too limited, and its accessibility too restricted. In fact, there is no future for it *as painting*. The hostility which it has already met, and its persistently low market-value, are traceable, in large measure, to its decorative impracticability. The best and most representative modernistic canvases must eventually go into museums to be properly seen and appreciated. There is no incentive in such a destiny for the creative artist. The invention of museums was an outgrowth of man's primitive instinct for placing corpses in a mausoleum; and the truly vital artist can find no inspiration in decorating a sepulchre's interior.

Now that painting has lost its emotional effi-

cacy, a new optical stimulus is required. The visual æsthetic needs of mankind must be fed and gratified. Since the older painting no longer meets these needs, and modern houses are becoming too cramped and congested to hold pictures; and since the art of color has no proper place in the home and is at present expressing itself through a medium which is both impracticable and inadequate: the time has come for a fundamental change in the very nature of this new color-art. Conditions are inevitably forcing into existence a new *métier* for its expression and new methods for its projection.

The most important indication that this change is imminent lies in the fact that no new modern art "school" has risen during the past ten years. From Delacroix to the outbreak of the last war the history of so-called modern painting was a continuous record of experimental groups, referred to as "schools." The first one of any significance to be known by a name was Impressionism, although there had already been numerous pioneers whose researches and theories had paved the way for the Impressionists' experimentations in light and vibration. After Monet, Pissarro, Guillaumin and Sisley there followed, in rapid succession, the Neo-Impressionists (or Pointil-

lists), the Pont-Avon School, the Post-Impressionists, the Cubists, the Orphists (or Simultaneists), and the Synchromists. Also, there were individual men, with coteries of followers and imitators, who escaped categorical designation, but who nevertheless constituted important links in the chain of æsthetic research—such as Cézanne and Renoir. (The latter was for a time enrolled under the banner of Impressionism, but he carried his work far beyond the findings of that school.)

Each of these experimental groups addressed itself to certain problems in the field of color. What these problems were and what each school achieved, need not concern us here. Suffice it to say that each group marked a logical forward step in the development of the theory and technique of color. With the advent of the Synchromists in 1912, all the problems of color that related to the painter's art, were solved. In my book, "Modern Painting," early in 1914, I wrote:

Ancient painting sounded the depths of composition. Modern painting has sounded the depths of color. Research is at an end. It now remains for artists to create. The means have been perfected: the laws of composition have been laid down. After Synchromism no more innovative "movements," or "schools," are possible. Any school of the future must necessarily be compositional.

It can be only a variation or modification of the past. The methods of painting may be complicated. New forms may be found. But it is no longer possible to add anything to the means at hand. The era of pure creation begins with the present day.

The activities and progress of "modern painting" since 1914 have substantiated these observations.

## X

The reason that the art of color has not progressed more rapidly during the past decade, is attributable to the fact that even after the culmination of technical research in color, there persisted in the practitioners of this new art, what might be called a "medium fixation." The modern artist was still bound by the mechanical characteristics of painting. His retention of canvas and pigments was but a convention of human conduct such as is to be found throughout all human progress. For example, when electric lights were first invented, and even after they became practical utilities, the bulbs, whether single or in bracket-groups, pointed upwards. Although a revolutionary and epoch-making idea had been conceived and perfected, the simple fact that enclosed lights could burn downwards was entirely overlooked. Gas-lights and all flames ascended; therefore, the electric bulbs were instinctively placed upright. The medium, so to speak, of the

older (or original) lighting devices persisted, wholly as a result of association and habit.

Throughout the entire history of inventions and discoveries we find this same curious lack of intellectual plasticity manifest in the selection of medium. The form which has been most closely associated with an idea almost invariably accompanies the first stages of any new statement of that idea. And since canvas and paint had always been associated with the art of visual representation, this medium accompanied the first stages of the new color-art's expression.

That pigment is not the proper medium for color is at last being realized. On every hand one sees evidences of a groping for some other vehicle of color-projection; and this groping is the result of a strongly felt inner need. This need did not assert itself during the experimental stages of color-development, for at that time the new artists were not concerned with the underlying principles of æsthetics. Their instinct was not so much creative as scientific; they were engaged in research rather than in artistic conception; and the medium of painting answered their purposes. But when these researches terminated, when the problems of color were disposed of, the exponents of this new procedure were left un-

hampered by the necessity of further experimentation. They were free to express the eternal principles of art through the new means. It was only then that the inadequacy of the painter's medium for creation in color became evident.

The gradual elimination of the recognizable object from "modern painting"—that is, the constant approach to pure abstraction of form—should have given a hint that a new art, entirely opposed to the aims of painting, was in process of growth. But even when all documentary representation had been excluded from pictures, and when no determinable shapes were present—when, in fine, a picture became merely a congeries of abstract color-forms and linear rhythms completely divorced from objective reality—the standards of painting continued to be applied; and the failure of such canvases to meet the older requirements of graphic art was vigorously condemned. It was at this point in the evolution of the art of color that the breach between the academic painter and the color-artist was widest, and that mutual recriminations reached their highest pitch.

At about this time certain of the modern men began to experiment in new media, though still clinging with one hand, as it were, to the *métier*



of painting. Bits of glass, pieces of newspaper, cotton-wool, pasteboard, bits of musical score, wooden chips, putty, coils of metal, and various other objects, made their appearance in the modern works of art. There was an almost frantic search for new textures. In sculpture Archipenko used glass and tin, which he painted over with harmonic colors. Wire and imitation hair were employed as a medium for busts; and clay began appearing on canvases, like bas-relief. There was widespread activity in the use of all manner of strange and bizarre media, many of the results being fully as absurd and ineffectual as the most conservative and horrified adherents of the older painting pronounced them to be.

But here again the animating impulse of the "freak" artists was lost sight of; and they were judged wholly by the aspects of their work. This straining after unusual and unconventional effects was, at bottom, a sincere attempt to find a novel means of visual expression. It evidenced a vital need for a more congenial medium through which to project the discoveries in the new art of color, and demonstrated conclusively that the modern artist instinctively realized the inadequacy of canvas and pigments. It was, indeed, the first purely creative activity of the new art-consciousness after

the experimental instinct had been exhausted. Moreover, the fact that these men were not content with the medium of painting, and that their impulses carried them away from the *métier* of graphic art, proved that they were not painters, either instinctively or intellectually.

## XI

What, one asks, will be the ultimate medium of this new art of color? There can be little doubt concerning the answer. Already the future of the art of color is evident. The medium of this new art will be light, namely: color in its purest, most intense form, and with determinable vibrations.

That light is the logical means for the expression of color is obvious, for color *is* light; and only through light (that is: the heliotropic aspect of color) can color be made to function most effectively. Pigments are merely colors by proxy, without purity, and low in vibration. The absorption and refraction process which is present in all pigmental colors, greatly reduces their brilliancy and neutralizes their densities and transparencies. Furthermore, pigments are constantly at the mercy of the light under which they are perceived, and they continually alter and shift—not only individually but in relation to one another—

under every slight atmospheric variation. On the other hand, the color (or vibration) of light can be rendered fixed and absolute. Light, in fact, is the only medium which answers all the requirements of the color-artist.

So inevitable was this medium that one may wonder why light did not at once suggest itself to the artist. The answer is that the physical and mechanical difficulties attaching to creative expression through light, are tremendous. The science of color itself has only begun to be probed. Then again, the proper method of expressing form through light had to be determined, and the instruments for its attainment invented.

The first indications of this new art of color as expressed through light, are the various "color-organs" and color-projecting machines which have come into existence during the past few years. Wallace-Rimington's color-organ was the first to exert any potent influence. But this machine was constructed before the artist had completed his researches in color-theory, and not only is Wallace-Rimington's chromatic scale incorrect, but his types of form are too limited for anything approaching æsthetic composition. Scriabine's attempt at combining color-lights with music was abortive and futile, and revealed a complete igno-

rance of the color researches of the modern painters. Thomas Wilfred's color-organ (the "clavilux")—the latest and most plastic of such instruments—is a decided advance over any other color-machine; but it, too, is lacking in æsthetic value, and is woefully restricted in the control of both forms and colors. Numerous other like devices have been conceived, but so far without appreciable artistic results.

The æsthetic failure of these instruments does not, at the present time, matter. By the mere projection of mobile colored lights they have proved the value—and, indeed, the inevitability—of this medium for the new art of color; and, even in their present crude form, they are not so inherently inadequate a medium as is oil paint. They have demonstrated the intensity of the physical reaction to color—the thing for which the modern artist has been striving. Also, they have shown that plastic color-forms are possible by the use of light; and they have done away with the representative object which hampered and limited the color-artist so long as he was necessitated to confine himself to the medium of painting. The color-organ, in fact, is the logical development of all the modern researches in the art of color. It is the only means whereby pure color-forms may

be significantly projected; and this is precisely the goal towards which every "modern painter" has been struggling for over a century.

The Synchronists were the first "school of painting" to foresee this future of the color-art. Also, they were the only modern school which was not antagonistic to the older painting. Many of their canvases were frank restatements, in color, of masterpieces by Rubens and Michelangelo. And it is a significant fact that the leading exponent of Synchronism has long since discarded pigments and canvas, and for years has been devoting his energies towards the achievement of a color-instrument which can be used to produce color-forms as the orchestra is now used to produce sound-forms.

## XII

The color-instrument of the future will not merely throw pretty squares, circles, coils, and volutes of colored light on a screen, but will be able to record the artist's moods, desires and emotions along any visually formal æsthetic line. Only when such an instrument has been perfected can the modern artist's creative conceptions be properly expressed. With the completion of this new medium the art of color will have entirely dissociated itself from the art of painting, not only in impulse and conception, but in the world's attitude towards it.

However, there is one point which must not be overlooked. The principles of form and organization which animate all great painting, and which are to be found in every great masterpiece of graphic art, are the identical principles on which the new art of color will be founded. For these principles are the same in all arts. They constitute the rationale of æsthetics, and are based

on the deepest physiological and intellectual needs of mankind. The fundamental relationship which has always existed between the various arts, will also exist between the older arts and the new art of color.

The canons of art formulated by Hsieh Ho in the fifth century, as recorded by Fenollosa, embody not only the philosophy of Chinese art, but that of all great art. They are:

(1) Rhythmic vitality: the life-movement of the spirit through the rhythm of things.

(2) Organic structure: the creative spirit incarnating itself in a pictorial conception.

(3) Conformity with nature. (We must understand these words in the Chinese sense: Nature is the ever-flowing, ever-producing, ever-manifesting life about and in us; really more the inner world than the mere external world of forms. Conformity means—conformity; not just photographic accuracy, as we would be apt at first to interpret it according to Western objects in art.)

(4) Arrangement: which again means not merely sensuously beautiful arrangement, but one that recognizes the ever-living mission of painting to tell that Nature provides the experiences of the soul, and that the Superior World, the Inner Di-



vine Meaning, is the inspiration and the Model of the other.

(5) Transmission of classic models. (This canon proves a long previous chain and inheritance of artistic tradition, the antetype of what we have left.)

These canons, or principles, were stated in Chinese art through line—line in the æsthetic sense of visualized directional forces, not in the sense of mere outline, or delimitation of forms; and these same principles which the great Chinese artists of old stated by means of line, the exponents of this new art of the future will strive to state by means of color. The art of color will be a new art only in medium; and until the day comes when an artist is great enough to express the profound form of a Rubens, or a Michelangelo, or a Beethoven, through this modern medium of light, the art of color will remain inferior to the other arts. That day may not come for many decades—perhaps for a century. But this fact should in nowise constitute a stricture against the art of color.

Herein, then, lies what I believe to be the future of the art of color—that art which has erroneously been regarded as an abortive manifestation of painting, and condemned accordingly.

As for the future of painting: we shall continue to have graphic art as in the past, with its schools and academies, its awards and official *salons*, and its great army of practitioners. There will always be the art of painting, just as there will always be the art of sculpture, despite the fact the one culminated æsthetically in Rubens, and the other in Michelangelo. Painting will continue to serve a decorative and representational purpose. But the art of color will be for occasional reaction and stimulation, like symphony concerts and the drama.

Those "modern painters" who predict that *their* art will be the one visual art of the future, and that the older painting will soon die out, are as preposterously wrong as the exponents of academic art who predict that "modern painting" is but a flash in the pan, which will soon pass away and leave the older painting supreme. Both are narrow partisans, blind to the true significance of the æsthetic forces at work in the world to-day.

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